

Conducting the After-Action Review

INTRODUCTION AND RULES

The training exercise is over, AAR preparation is complete, and key players are at the designated AAR site. It is now time to conduct the AAR. The leader should begin with some type of "attention getter" -- a joke, an appropriate anecdote, or a historical example that relates to the training, exercise, event, or conduct of the AAR. Then, if necessary, he reviews the purpose and sequence of the AAR to ensure everyone understands what an AAR is and how it works. His introduction should include the following thoughts:

- An AAR is a dynamic, candid, professional discussion of training which focuses on unit performance against the Army standard for the tasks being trained. Everyone can, and should, participate if they have an insight, observation, or question which will help the unit identify and correct deficiencies or maintain strengths.
- An AAR is not a critique. No one, regardless of rank, position, or strength of personality, has all of the information or answers. After-action reviews maximize training benefits by allowing soldiers, regardless of rank, to learn from each other.
- An AAR does not grade success or failure. There are always weaknesses to improve and strengths to sustain.

NOTE: Figure 4-1 contains a recommended sequence for conducting an AAR.

Introduction and rules

Review of objectives and intent

Training objectives

Commander's mission/intent (what was supposed to happen)

OPFOR commander's mission/intent

Relevant doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs)

Summary of recent events (what happened)

Discussion of key issues

Chronological order of events

Battlefield operating system (BOS)

Key events/themes/issues

Discussion of optional issues

Soldier/leader skills

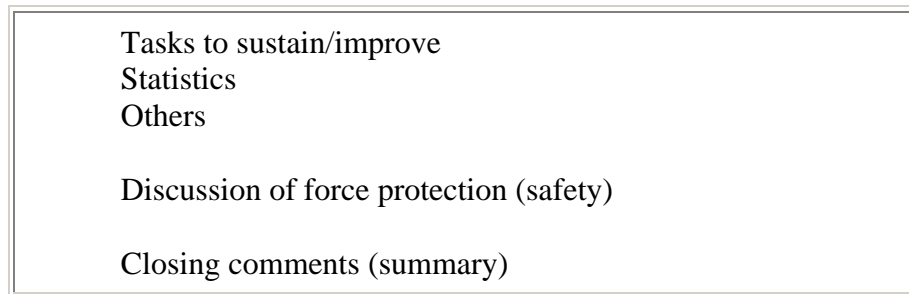


Figure 4-1. Sequence for Conducting AARs

Soldier participation is directly related to the atmosphere created during the introduction. The AAR leader should make a concerted effort to draw in and include soldiers who seem reluctant to participate. The following techniques can help the leader create an atmosphere conducive to maximum participation. He should--

- Enter the discussion only when necessary.
- Reinforce the fact that it is permissible to disagree.
- Focus on learning and encourage people to give honest opinions.
- Use open-ended and leading questions to guide the discussion of soldier, leader, and unit performance.

REVIEW OF OBJECTIVES AND INTENT

Training Objectives

The AAR leader should review unit training objectives for the training mission(s) the AAR will cover. He should also restate the tasks being reviewed as well as the conditions and standards for the tasks.

Commander's Mission and Intent (What Was Supposed to Happen)

Using maps, operational graphics, terrain boards, and so on, the commander should restate the mission and his intent. Then, if necessary, the discussion leader should guide the discussion to ensure everyone understands the plan and the commander's intent. Another technique is to have subordinate leaders restate the mission and discuss their commander's intent.

OPFOR Commander's Mission and Intent

In a formal AAR, the OPFOR commander explains his plan to defeat friendly forces. He uses the same training aids as the friendly force commander so participants can understand the relationship of both plans.

SUMMARY OF RECENT EVENTS (WHAT HAPPENED)

The AAR leader now guides the review using a logical sequence of events to describe and discuss what happened. He should not ask yes or no questions, but encourage participation and guide discussion by using open-ended and leading questions. An open-ended question has no specific answer and allows the person answering to reply based on what was significant to him. Open-ended questions are also much less likely to put him on the defensive. This is more effective in finding out what happened. For example, it is better to ask,

"SGT Johnson, what happened when your Bradley crested the hill?"

rather than--

"SGT Johnson, why didn't you engage the enemy tanks to your front?"

As the discussion expands and more soldiers add their perspectives, what really happened will become clear. Remember, this is not a critique or lecture; the OC does not tell the soldiers or leaders what was good or bad. However, the AAR leader must ensure specific issues are revealed, both positive and negative in nature. Skillful guidance of the discussion will ensure the AAR does not gloss over mistakes or unit weaknesses.

DISCUSSION OF KEY ISSUES

The AAR is a problem-solving process. The purpose of discussion is for participants to discover strengths and weaknesses, propose solutions, and adopt a course of action to correct problems. Leaders can organize the discussion using one of the three techniques in the following paragraphs.

Discussion Techniques

Chronological Order of Events

This technique is logical, structured, and easy to understand. It follows the flow of training from start to finish and allows soldiers to see the effects of their actions on other units and events. By covering actions in the order they took place, soldiers and leaders are better able to recall what happened.

Battlefield Operating Systems (BOS)

To focus and structure the AAR, the leader can also use the seven BOS (Figure 4-2). By focusing on each BOS and discussing it across all phases of the training exercise, participants can identify systemic strengths and weaknesses. This technique is particularly useful in training staff sections whose duties and responsibilities directly relate to one or more BOS. However, leaders using this technique must be careful not to lose sight of the big picture. They must not get into long discussions about BOS which do not relate to mission accomplishment.

1. Intelligence (INTEL)
2. Maneuver (MVR)
3. Fire Support (FS)
4. Mobility, countermobility, survivability (M, C, S)
5. Air Defense (AD)
6. Combat Service Support (CSS)
7. Command and Control (C²)

Figure 4-2. The Seven BOS

Key Events/Themes/Issues

A key events discussion focuses on critical training events which directly support training objectives the chain of command identified before the exercise began. Keeping a tight focus on these events prevents the discussion from becoming sidetracked by issues which do not relate to training objectives. This technique is particularly effective when time is limited.

Fratricide

All incidents